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PROBLEMS WITH HUME'S 'DEFINITIONS OF CAUSE' (SURVEY THESIS):
FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF 'ANALYTICAL ARGUMENTS' AND 'ANTI-ANALYTICAL ARGUMENTS'

Masumi AOKI

o. Introduction

'A causes B'. In our everyday life, we routinely observe and describe particular pairs of objects or events as having a causal relationship. That is, we assert that two particular separate objects, A and B, are linked in a particular manner. What enables this linkage? It can be said that this question raises one of the major problems in the philosophy of David Hume. According to Hume, many thinkers in their traditional metaphysical arguments have advanced the notion that some kind of 'power' exists linking A to B. However, Hume asserted that it is absurd to suppose that there is a 'power' between A and B since it is impossible for us to perceive this 'power' in any way. Yet, insofar as we think that A and B are necessarily connected, it would seem nonsense to insist that causation does not exist. In short, Hume's finding was that there is no power between A and B, but rather we have the experience of 'constant conjunction' in which two particular objects are contiguous, and one preceding the other. According to Hume, this experience of constant conjunction enables us to form the habit of uniting the two objects, and it is from a projection of this feeling of uniting enforcement that our idea of necessity derives.

Hume's theory of causation may indeed be caught in this way, but given the complexity of Hume's description, there are many details that do not seem to suit with this large frame. Hume's two 'definitions of cause', which appear late in the causal theory he presents in his *Treatise*¹ and first *Enquiry*², constitute one of these details. Although these two 'definitions of cause' at a glance appear as a formulation of Hume's causal theory, should they really be treated as a true summary of that theory? What did Hume really mean when he presented his definitions in this manner? Many researchers have taken on the challenge of interpreting his intent.

The first critics of Hume's causal theory were Thomas Reid (1710-96) and Henry Home Lord Kames (1696-1782), who lived contemporaneously with Hume. Later, while Robinson, Richards, and Gotterbarn argued about the logical equivalence between Hume's two definitions, Kemp Smith and Galen Strawson broadened the discussion and offered unique interpretations of Hume's definitions. In this thesis, I provide an overview of the various interpretations that have been offered, distinguishing between what I label 'analytical interpretations', which mainly address the pure logical equivalence between the two definitions, and the 'anti-analytical interpretations', which seek to understand the definitions in the full context of Hume's causal theory. The former (analytical) interpretations regard the two definitions literally, as pure logical definitions, and apply their own semantic analysis to help our understanding of Hume's theory, while the latter (anti-analytical) interpretations can be said to remove the former's assumption of 'linguistic defini-

¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40)

² ———, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1747)

tions' and attempt to find Hume's true motive for 'defining' causation in such a way.

In the first chapter of this paper, problems with Hume's 'definitions of cause', as presented in his *Treatise*, are identified. A survey of critical 'analytical arguments' is then provided in the second chapter; 'anti-analytical arguments' are presented in the third.

1. Hume's 'definitions of cause'

1.1. 'Definitions of cause' problem

Hume's causal theory appears primarily in the third part of the *Treatise*, *Book 1*. It is near the end of Part 3, in the 14th section, that he presents his two 'definitions of cause':

Definition 1 (D1): (We may define a CAUSE to be) 'An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac'd in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter.' (T 1.3.14.31)³

Definition 2 (D2): '(A CAUSE is) an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea, of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.' (ibid.)

My thesis focuses on the following two points: First, Hume has proposed the two definitions as a summarization of his causal theory. In fact, Lord Kames and Reid criticized the definitions based on the assumption that they are at least a sufficient conclusion of Hume's causal theory. However, are these two definitions, in reality, truly sufficient summaries of Hume's theory? Indeed, this issue has become a significant problem among interpreters. My second point is that there is a problem with the relationship between the two definitions. Hume states that the two definitions are 'only different by their presenting a different view of the same object' (ibid.). That is, according to Hume, although the views that each of the definitions presented are different, they carry the same essential meaning. At first reading, Hume's assertion is difficult to grasp. In what sense are they 'different' or 'the same'? Robinson, Richards, and Gotterbarn explored the logical equivalence between the two definitions.

In the history of Hume's causal theory, from the time Hume lived to the beginning of the 20th century, many researchers, including Reid and James Beattie (1735-1803), have held a standard interpretation of Hume, which sees him as a strong sceptic. These researchers shared a generally low opinion of Hume's

³ Hume discusses the 'definitions of cause' both in the *Treatise* and in the first *Enquiry*, and the expressions in these two places are subtly different. However, the import of the 'definitions of cause' themselves is said to be the same. Therefore, in this thesis, I will mainly use the expressions from the *Treatise*.

⁴ For the *Treatise*, reference is indicated by the letter T, followed by book, part, section, and paragraph number. For the first *Enquiry*, reference is indicated by E, followed by section, part, and paragraph number. Hence, for example: T 1.3.14.31; E 7.2.29. In addition, (...) is added by for the clarification of meaning of a sentence.

definitions of cause. However, their standard interpretation proved to be erroneous, at least according to Norman Kemp-Smith, who wrote 'The Naturalism of Hume' (1905). In his work, for the first time, Hume's definitions of cause were positively valued. Kemp-Smith influenced later Hume interpreters in significant ways: Throughout the middle of the 20th century, the analytical interpreters gave negative responses, while the anti-analytical interpreters such as Strawson advanced their research along the direction of Kemp-Smith's arguments. From the second half of the 20th century to today, the latter arguments have held the initiative. In fact, one of the main themes running through efforts in the 1990s to re-ignite interest in Hume in the so-called 'New Hume Debate' focused on trying to understand Hume's intention in 'defining' cause as he did.

1.2. For the 'definitions of cause' in the *Treatise*

In order to establish a clear difference between the two definitions (designated D₁ and D₂), we can consider them in a cognitive model: 'I observe a causal relationship in which A causes B'. On examination, it appears that D₁ does not include the viewpoint of the observer; that is, there is no 'I' in D₁. D₁ simply describes the observable state that 'A causes B'. On the other hand, D₂ expresses the 'A causes B' relationship as an event that happens in the mind of the observer.

In order to analyse these contrasting notions in closer detail, let us examine them with a concrete example in which a cause, 'the collision of billiard ball A with billiard ball B', is paired with an effect, 'the motion of billiard ball B'. Under definition D₁, such a situation can be examined using each of the two parts of the definition: the first part (D₁^a) corresponding to D₁'s opening words, 'We may define a CAUSE to be an object precedent and contiguous to another', and the second part (D₁^b) corresponding to the remainder of D₁, 'where all the objects resembling the former are plac'd in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects that resemble the latter'. In D₁^a, it is said that a cause and an effect are put in a relationship of 'contiguity' and a relationship of 'succession'. That is, Hume's first observation in D₁ is that, if two objects (events) are in a causal relationship, one object follows on the other and the two are contiguous. In our example, the event 'the motion of billiard ball B' follows on the other event 'the collision of billiard ball A with billiard ball B', and they are contiguous to one another⁵. With reference to D₁^b, it can be said that, in all other instances involving the 'collision' and the 'motion' that have happened, or will happen, A and B are always in this same relationship of 'succession' and 'contiguity'. In other words, Hume's second observation in D₁ is that the 'collision' and the 'motion' are in a relation of 'constant conjunction'. Thus, this is the relationship of 'succession', 'contiguity', and 'constant conjunction' that D₁ describes in the *Treatise*.

In D₂, the relationship of 'contiguity' and 'succession' is the same as in D₁. The difference between D₁

⁵ According to Hume, the relation of 'contiguity' has a very broad meaning. For example, when there are certain objects, C, D, E, etc., between a cause A and an effect B, it can be said that A and B are contiguous, were all of them in the relation of 'contiguity'.

and D₂ lies in the nature of the connection between cause and effect. In D₁, the manner of connecting a cause with an effect is expressed as a ‘constant conjunction’, while in D₂ it is expressed as follows: ‘the idea, of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other’. Namely, in D₂, it is a ‘determination of the mind’ that connects the ‘collision’ (cause) to the ‘motion’ (effect).

To address this apparently puzzling conclusion, Hume proceeds to his argument in the *Treatise*, concentrating his effort on asserting that we can neither **perceive** nor **demonstrate** the existence of those ‘powers’ of connection that many traditional causal theories suppose. However, it is misleading to conclude from this that there is no causation in the world, or that we do not have causal reasoning.⁶ Hume then proceeds to change the target of the observing, from the objects themselves to the observer, that is, from the objects to the ‘I’ who observe(s) the objects. He states:

(...) But upon farther enquiry I find, that the repetition is not in every particular the same, but produces a new impression, and by that means the idea, which I at present examine. For after a frequent repetition, I find, that upon the appearance of one of the objects, the mind is *determin’d* by custom to consider its usual attendant, and to consider it in a stronger light upon account of its relation to the first object. ’Tis this impression, then, or *determination*, which affords me the idea of necessity. (T 1.3.14.1)

Thus it is not strictly from the memory of ‘collisions of billiard balls’ that have often happened in the past that we find the idea of necessity that connects a cause to an effect. Yet, from observing this very experience, we now find that, in our **minds**, there are certain customs of connecting particular pairs of objects. It is this natural connection (association) of ideas that enables a necessary connection of causality. In the *Treatise*, this argument of concluding ‘determination of the mind’ as an origin of the idea of necessity corresponds to the latter half of D₂.

Taken together, while D₁ expresses the relationships of ‘contiguity’, ‘succession’, and ‘constant conjunction’ as something witnessed by the observer, D₂ expresses, in addition to ‘contiguity’ and ‘succession’, the manner of the connection, describing it as a natural association of ideas in the mind of the observer. However, as mentioned earlier, many thinkers have criticized Hume’s definitions⁷. The criticisms put forth by Thomas Reid and Lord Kames are especially useful in posing the problems.

⁶ Here, I do not mean that Hume’s main claim is not an anti-causal realism, but that Hume argues that it is too hasty to reach anti-causal realism based only on the impossibility of **perceiving** or **demonstrating** the existence of the ‘powers’. There are many interpretations of Hume’s final conclusion of his causal theory, e.g. causal-realist-interpretations or anti-causal-realist-interpretations, yet my intention here is to analyze Hume’s text, taking as neutral a position as possible.

⁷ Apart from the Scottish School of Common Sense, which included contemporaries of Hume, there are modern critics such as Michael Tooley who are referred to as ‘anti-Humean’.

1.3. Criticisms by the Scottish School of Common Sense

From the 18th century to the 19th century, many members of the Scottish School of Common Sense, including Reid, were greatly influenced by Hume. From the assumption of regarding Hume's 'idealistic philosophy' as rooted in the idealism of Descartes, they criticized Hume for reaching an impasse in his scepticism and, focusing on 'common sense', favoured direct intuition rather than indirect ideas. Reid criticized Hume's definitions of cause rather caustically:

It follows from this definition of a cause, that night is the cause of day, and day the cause of night. For no two things have more constantly followed each other since the beginning of the world. (Reid Thomas⁸, p.249)

Lord Kames, who was one of the founders of the Scottish School of Common Sense, was equally critical:

In a garrison, the soldiers constantly turn out at a certain beat of the drum. The gates of the town are opened and shut regularly, as the clock points at a certain hour. These connected facts are observed by a child, are associated in his mind, and the association becomes habitual during a long life. The man however, if not a changeling, never imagines the beat of the drum to be the cause of the motion of the soldiers; nor the pointing of the clock to a certain hour, to be the cause of the opening or shutting of the gates. (Lord Kames⁹, p.299)

While Reid criticizes D₁, Lord Kames challenges D₂. As is clear from their words, they argue that if we were to accept Hume's causal theory, relationships that are in reality not in any way causal would be treated as causal. Furthermore, they assert that if identifying causal relationships was nothing more than a 'determination of the mind', such relationships would vary from one person's experience of 'constant conjunction' to another's.

Two points from these criticisms can be used to advance the discussion. First, in his criticism, Reid noted that a 'causal relationship' is **reduced to** 'contiguity', 'succession', and 'constant conjunction' in Hume's definitions. That is, in Reid's view, Hume's definitions were simply a rephrasing of the notion of a 'causal relationship' using other words. Is this really a proper assessment? Did Hume really intend his definition to be merely a rephrasing? These questions will be considered shortly.

The core issue in Lord Kames' criticism is the problem of our experiences. As previously noted, while D₁ commits only to the relationship between objects, D₂ considers the relationship to be a matter of association of ideas in the mind of an individual, which is dependent on one's experiences. Thus, while D₁ does not require experience, D₂ does, raising the question of whether objects that are inherently the same will be considered differently under the two definitions. This issue will be taken up in the next chapter.

⁸ Reid Thomas, *Essays on the Active powers of Man* (1788)

⁹ Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1779)

2. Analytical arguments

A brief survey of the arguments of J.A. Robinson, T.J. Richards, and D. Gotterbarn, which dealt with the problems of inherent relationships between D₁ and D₂ is presented next.

2. 1. J.A. Robinson, ‘Hume’s Two Definitions of “Cause”’ (1962)

Robinson points out that the two definitions are not equivalence, either intentionally or extensionally, in a more refined way than Lord Kames. According to Robinson, we can suppose a situation in which a cause and effect pair that satisfies D₁ ($C(x, y)$) has never been experienced by an observer, meaning that this $C(x, y)$ *fails* to satisfy D₂. Likewise, we can also suppose a situation in which a $C(x, y)$ that satisfies D₂ in the mind of an observer was formed by extra-ordinary experiences, characteristic only of this observer. In such a case, $C(x, y)$ satisfies only D₂. (Consider the examples of Lord Kames.) Hence, Robinson concludes that not only are the definitions different in meaning in reality, but also that we cannot logically establish an equivalence of the definitions, even when each definitions is applied to the same object.

Robinson seeks to explain why Hume proposed these two inequivalent definitions as equivalent, ultimately concluding that Hume’s distinction of definitions corresponds to the two distinctive directions of Hume’s philosophy. On the one hand, Hume is ‘pursuing the philosophical task of analysing and clarifying concepts’, in which direction D₁ proceeds; on the other hand, he is ‘propounding what amounts to an empirical law of psychology’, in which direction D₂ proceeds. As Hume subtitled the *Treatise* ‘An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects’, he sought to describe ‘causal relation’ as a mental phenomenon in D₂. In contrast, he analysed the concept of a ‘causal relation’ in D₁. For Robinson, then, it is not D₂ that strictly conforms to the term ‘definition’; rather it is D₁. Hence, he concludes that only D₁ serves as Hume’s definition of ‘causal relation’. D₂ is not definitional, but rather it is a mere ‘restatement’ of D₁. In this way, Robinson treats D₁ as central and D₂ as complementary.

2. 2. T.J. Richards, ‘Hume’s Two Definitions of “Cause”’ (1962)

Richards rejected Robinson’s interpretation, asserting that both D₁ and D₂ are ‘definitions’ after all. He points out an inherent inconsistency in Robinson’s theory. Robinson essentially argues that (a) the definitions are not equivalent and that (b) that which is defined by D₁ is restated in D₂. According to Richards, however, (a) and (b) are inconsistent; although Robinson regards D₂ as derived from D₁, there exist certain cases that satisfy D₂ but not D₁. Accordingly, if we accept Robinson’s theory, D₂ would allow ‘false statements’.

Richards puts an emphasis on Hume’s statement that (the two definitions are) ‘only different by their presenting a different view of the same object’¹⁰ (T 1.3.14.31) and asserts that both definitions should be treated as distinct ‘definitions’. According to Richards, each definition has its own issue: a problem of

¹⁰ Emphasis added.

'What is being asserted?' (D₁) and 'What states of affairs must obtain for the asserter properly to believe that A causes B?' (D₂).

In order to reject Robinson's assertion, Richards attempts to establish two points. First, D₂ is not a derivative of D₁, but is formed independently. Secondly, D₂ is not a '**restatement** of the empirical law of psychology', but a perfect 'definition'. For the first point, focusing on Hume's referring to the relationship in D₁ as a 'philosophical relation' and the relationship in D₂ as a 'natural relation'¹¹, Richards asserts that a 'natural relation' is an associating property that emerges naturally and does not arise from 'philosophical relations' that contain mere unnatural comparisons. To this second point, Richards, again focusing on the notion of a 'natural relation', states that 'to say that a relation is natural is to say that the two related objects A and B are related in such a way as to bring about an association of ideas'¹². In other words, he asserts that in D₂, Hume, on the presupposition that there are natural causal associations of ideas in us, analyzed this manner of associating. Richards concludes that 'D₂ does then allude to an empirical psychological matter, but D₂ itself is strictly a definition'¹³.

2. 3. D. Gotterbarn, 'Hume's Two Lights on Cause' (1971)

In response to the arguments of Robinson and Richards, Gotterbarn provides an interpretation intended to promote a better understanding of Hume's statement that (the two definitions are) 'only different, by their presenting a different view of the same object' (T 1.3.14.31). It is notable that Gotterbarn uses the word 'same' not as equal intentionally, but rather as equal extensionally. According to Gotterbarn, Robinson's assertion that the 'definitions are **not** equal **extensionally**' (part of his broader assertion that the definitions are equal '**neither extensionally nor intentionally**') is a false interpretation of Hume's theory. Gotterbarn attributes Robinson's failure to his misunderstanding of Hume's statement of 'a different view of the same object'.

According to Gotterbarn, there are two reasons for this extensional misunderstanding. First, although it might appear that a causal relation defined by D₂ requires an 'observer' of the relation while D₁ does not, in reality this is not the case. If the definitions did in fact differ on this point, then some causal pairs could satisfy one or the other of the two definitions, but not both. In reality, however, argues Gotterbarn, not

¹¹ Hume characterized the causal relation defined in D₁ as 'philosophical' and the one defined in D₂ as 'natural'. (T 1.3.6.16, T 1.3.14.31, etc.) This characterization is based on his division of relationships into two types in T.1.1.4-5. There Hume states that, while a 'natural relation' is a relation used in our daily life, a 'philosophical relation' is a relation used only in philosophy. A 'natural relation' is a 'natural' property of connecting (associating) ideas, which Hume expresses as 'a gentle force'. For a 'philosophical relation', the scope of the meaning of 'natural relation' is extended, and even objects that we usually consider to 'have no relationship' are considered to 'have a certain relationship' in that they are 'compared' to each other. According to Hume, there are three 'natural relations' and seven 'philosophical relations'. It is remarkable that 'causation' (cause and effect) is included in both categories.

¹² Richards, p.379

¹³ *ibid.*

only D2 but also D1 requires an ‘observer’. According to Gotterbarn, this stems from Hume’s designation of a ‘philosophical relation’ as the ‘comparison of ideas’, which of necessity ‘requires an agent or comparer to do the comparing’¹⁴.

The second reason for such an extensional misunderstanding is rooted in the idea that there does not seemingly exist in D1 the ‘determination of the mind’ that is a central factor in D2. According to Gotterbarn, however, both D2 and D1 involve this factor. To make his case, Gotterbarn focuses on the word ‘like’ in D1. In the second half of D1, Hume uses the phrase ‘all the objects ... are placed in **like** relations’ (a part of ‘where all the objects resembling the former are placed in **like** relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects that resemble the latter’)¹⁵. Gotterbarn points out that this phrase asserts uniformity theory, which requires a mental determination in Humean causal theory. Thus, ‘in D1 the mental determination is implicit and in D2 it is explicit’¹⁶.

Based on this reasoning, Gotterbarn asserts that we can achieve a clearer understanding of Hume’s use of the phrase ‘a different view of the same object’. Gotterbarn states that ‘just as we can talk of a single white sphere by talking about either its color or figure, depending on which we want to emphasize, so we can offer either D1 or D2 as definitions of the causal relation depending on whether we want to emphasize its role as a philosophical or a natural relation’¹⁷.

The above is a survey of the ‘analytical arguments’ concerning the problem of Hume’s ‘definitions of cause’. I regard these arguments as transforming traditional criticisms, such as that offered by Reid, refreshing the essential questions, analysing them logically, and searching for the meaning of Hume’s description. However, if we inquire further, there arises another question: What precisely is meant by ‘define’ in Hume’s ‘definitions of cause’? ‘Anti-analytical arguments’ mainly deal with this issue.

3. Anti-analytical arguments

3. 1. N. Kemp-Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (1941)

Norman Kemp-Smith was epoch-making in that his work marked a new trend in Hume-interpretation—the ‘naturalistic’ interpretation—which directly opposed the total-sceptic interpretations such as those of Reid and Beattie. According to Kemp-Smith, the intent of the *Treatise* was not to advance a destructive scepticism, seen as a continuation of the ‘idealism of Locke and Berkeley’, but to reject the traditional Western view of the ‘rational human’ and revalue the role of emotion. Following this course of interpretation, Kemp-Smith interprets Hume’s definitions as ‘ostensive’ ones. When we try to explain ‘red’, for example, we cannot describe it without using some instance of redness, such as ‘the red of this apple’. In this way, we

¹⁴ Gotterbarn, p.387, emphasis added.

¹⁵ Identified earlier as D1^b, emphasis added.

¹⁶ Gotterbarn, p.389

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.390

are explaining something 'ostensively'. According to Kemp-Smith, Hume did not **strictly define** 'cause' as analytical researchers insist, but rather he **expressed the meaning** of it by using words 'foreign to it', 'ostensively'.

The reason Hume's definitions are not so-called logical ones is that the causal relation that Hume presents is not an **intelligible knowledge**, but a **mere belief**. Quoting Hume's paragraph refuting an assumed antagonist (T 1.3.14.27), Kemp-Smith summarizes Hume's position as follows: Hume's thesis is '(1) that causal connection, as a mode of *necessitated* connection, is *felt* by the mind, and that this *feeling* is the impression which makes possible to the mind the idea of such causal connection; and (2) that while we are thus in possession of the idea, it is not the kind of idea which can render real connection in any instance whatsoever *intelligible* to us"¹⁸. He adds, 'thanks to the "quality of human nature"', we are certainly possessed of the idea of necessary connection in a manner that we *feel* an impression naively, i.e. we *feel as (if) apprehending* an independently existing object. However, Kemp-Smith argues, we cannot have distinct notions of the ideas of causal terms such as agency, necessary connection, etc., but only find them mysterious and barely intelligible. Thus, as we have no choice but to suppose causation imaginarily, Hume is constrained to recognize that causation can be defined only in terms foreign to it"¹⁹. 'When we approach it as a philosophical relation we can define it only in terms of mere uniformity. When we treat it as a natural relation, we can define it only as a determination of the mind, not of the objects concerned'"²⁰.

In referring to Hume's use of 'determination' in his definition of 'causation', Kemp-Smith allows that 'clearly "determination" is here more or less synonymous with causation', apparently recognizing that, in so doing, Hume appears to violate his own objection to using such a definitional device. (Although Hume states that 'the terms of EFFICACY, AGENCY, POWER, (...) are all nearly synonymous; and therefore it is an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest' (T 1.3.14.4), it seems that Hume himself defines causation by using a synonymous word, 'determination'.) According to Kemp-Smith, however, 'since in so doing he was not professing to disclose the idea of causation by way of the definition, but only to be resorting to causation in these two modes for the purpose of giving a causal account of the origin of our idea of it, and of the use to which we then put it, there is no real inconsistency in his method of procedure'"²¹.

3. 2. G. Strawson, *The Secret Connection* (1989)

Galen Strawson expands Kemp-Smith's idea of 'mysterious causation' —causation incapable of being re-

¹⁸ Kemp-Smith, p.398

¹⁹ The subtlety of expressions with which Hume states his definitions is noteworthy: 'We may define a CAUSE to be (...D1...). If this definition be esteemed defective, **because drawn from objects foreign to the cause**, we may substitute this other definition in its place, *viz.* (...D2...). Shou'd this definition also be rejected **for the same reason**, I know no other remedy, than that the persons, who express this delicacy, shou'd substitute a juster definition in its place' (T 1.3.14.31) Emphasis added.

²⁰ Kemp-Smith, p.400

²¹ *ibid.*, p.402

duced to another concept—into ‘sceptical realism’, interpreting Hume’s causal theory as follows: Hume’s argument that ‘we cannot perceive any causal power in the objects’ is ‘merely epistemological’ and is not truly an argument denying the existence of ‘causal power’ in the objects. According to Strawson, ‘when we talk of causal connection between two objects we do not really mean the real causal connection between them (which of course exists), but (given the theory of ideas) mean only that they have acquired a connection in our thought on account of having been observed to be constantly conjoined’²². Thus, Hume epistemologically noted the *profound limitations on the human capacity to grasp the nature of reality*. Strawson insists that, ‘in our unreflective moments (or alternatively our excessively exalted philosophical moments) we are pretty sure we know about causal power in the objects if we know about anything. (...) This would certainly be an extraordinary conclusion, but I (Strawson) do not think it ever crossed Hume’s mind’, because Hume’s point is that, ‘despite the fact that there is (of course) such a thing as Causation or causal power, and despite the fact that it is all around us, all pervasive, governing our thoughts and actions and our world in all respects, still human understanding is utterly incapable of grasping its true nature *in any way*’²³.

According to Strawson, then, in any attempt to understand the idea of causation, we have no choice but to ‘define’ it **imperfectly**²⁴ by using words foreign to it. Hence, Strawson regards Hume’s ‘definitions of cause’ as ‘seriously imperfect’. Both Kemp-Smith and Strawson appeal to Hume’s phrase ‘drawn from something foreign to cause’ to interpret his ‘definitions of cause’, but their conclusions are somewhat different. While Kemp-Smith regards them not as strict definitions but as ostensive, yet still genuine, definitions, Strawson regards them as imperfect definitions, incapable of ever truly defining ‘real’ causation. Accordingly, Strawson understands Hume’s definitions in a sceptical-realistic sense: Even in full awareness of the impossibility of ‘defining’ causation, Hume clarified that all we can get to know of causation is the content of the two definitions²⁵. He states that by using such a subtle manner in arguing that ‘if D1 be esteemed defective, **because drawn from objects foreign to the cause**, we may substitute D2, and if D2 also be rejected **for the same reason**, Hume knows no other remedy’.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have surveyed the various interpretations of Hume’s ‘definitions of cause’ as presented near the end of his causal theory in the *Treatise* and in the first *Enquiry*. It can be said that the critical refutations of Hume’s definitions offered by Lord Kames and Reid provided a foundation for Robinson’s criticism that the two definitions are not equivalent, either intentionally or extensionally. Richards and Gotterbarn at-

²² Strawson, p.206

²³ *ibid.*, pp.206-7

²⁴ As to the word ‘imperfect’, Strawson quotes from the first *Enquiry*, which depicts it more clearly than does the *Treatise*: ‘So imperfect are the ideas which we form concerning it, that is impossible to give any just definition of *cause*, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it.’ (E 7.2.29)

²⁵ Strawson, p.210

tempted to overcome this inequivalence. In chapter 2, these arguments were collectively characterized as 'analytical arguments' dealing only with the logical equivalence between the two definitions. In chapter 3, the criticisms by Kemp-Smith and Strawson were presented as 'anti-analytical arguments' opposed to the analytic interpreters' idea that Hume did (or at least tried to) 'define (reduce into some other concept)' causation.

It can be argued that the former (analytical) arguments do not touch the core of Hume's causal theory since they stick to only one issue, equivalence. In contrast, the 'anti-analytical arguments' can be said to try to interpret 'definitions of cause' from a broader view. However, one can ask whether Kemp-Smith and Strawson properly comprehend Hume's texts, in that they treat his 'definitions of cause' to suit their own 'Hume'. What is important is understanding Hume's intention in concluding his causal theory by presenting these definitions. In my opinion, the reason that Hume's causal theory has had such great influence on later philosophy is that it introduced the empirical observation of cause and effect; that is, it introduced the 'experimental method of reasoning'. Although it led to a destructive conclusion, Hume carried out the method thoroughly. And while Hume's definitions were widely criticized because of this destructive conclusion, as the prominent results of a thorough empiricism, they became the foundation of a new stream of causal theory that treated causation as regularity, giving us the regularity view of causation. In concluding this thesis, I propose as my future task a thorough examination of Hume's 'definitions of cause' based on these two important aspects—the destructive conclusion of the two definitions and their role in promoting the practice of empiricism.

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